Guillaume Apollinaire

THE BESTIARY

or Procession of Orpheus

Translated, with an essay, by X. J. Kennedy

Woodcuts by Raoul Dufy

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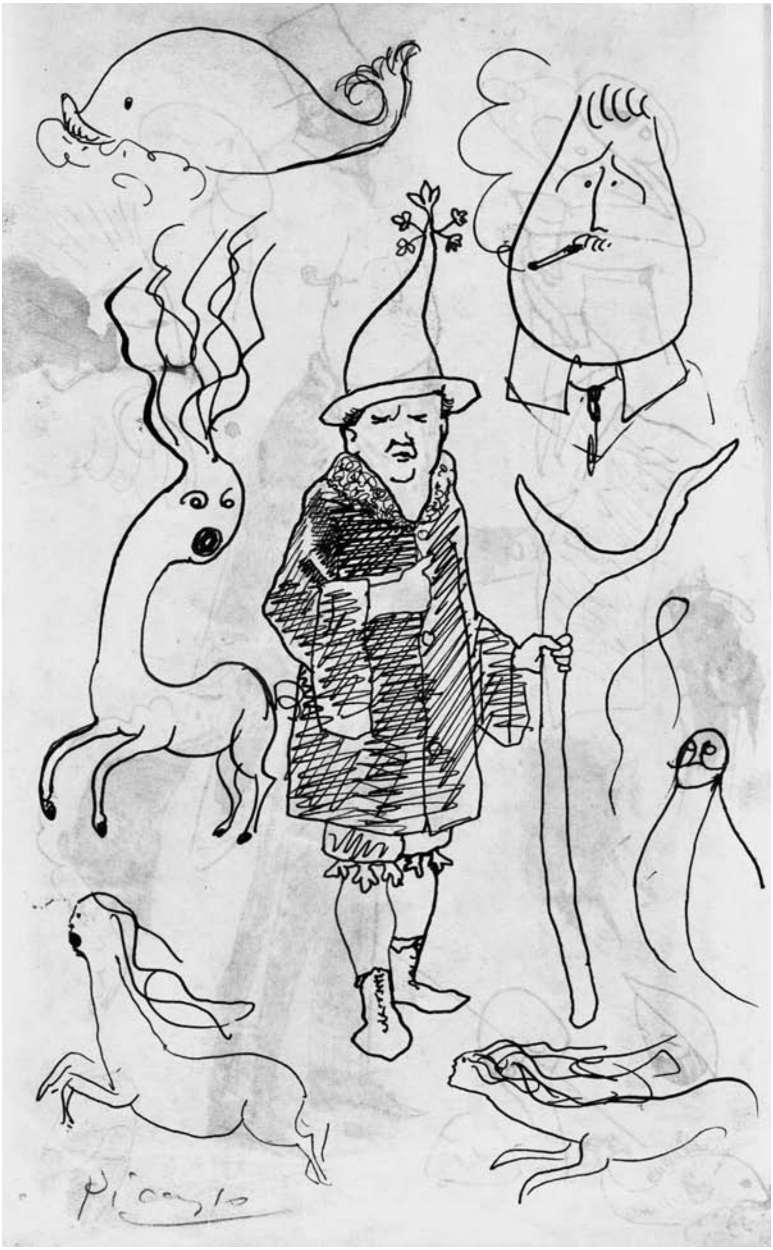
or Procession of Orpheus


Picasso

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A Natural History of the Poet

Apollinaire's Mythic Zoology

The Bestiary, or Procession of Orpheus is Guillaume Apollinaire's very first book of poems, published in 1909, and in it we find the genetic code of his work to come. Only two years later, it was followed by his ground-breaking collection *Alcools,* to which hosts of later French poets remain indebted, as do many elsewhere in the world. But evidently this earlier book has an interest and importance beyond its modest size. Among those whose fresh energy and innovations swept through the arts in France during the belle époque, Apollinaire occupies a central place. It would be hard to exaggerate his contributions, both to poetry and to the advancement of the graphic arts.

As a widely published art critic and journalist and a hard-working lecturer, Apollinaire vigorously promoted the work of many young painters and sculptors. In 1904, he began a close if occasionally troubled friendship with Pablo Picasso, whose work he championed tirelessly. He lavished praise on the group of new painters who had cheerfully accepted the derisive label of Fauves ("wild beasts"), among them Braque, Dufy, Matisse, Rouault, and Vlaminck. He helped organize a Cubist exhibition at the famous Salon des Indépendents in 1911, and in 1913 published his one book on art, *Les Peintres cubistes* (The Cubist Painters). From 1902 until his death in 1918, he wrote essays on art and reviews; from 1910 through 1914, his column "La Vie artistique" appeared in the Paris newspaper *L'Intransigeant* nearly every day. He invented the term *surréalisme*, applying it to a ballet by Jean Cocteau. He befriended Emilio Martinetti and in 1913 brought out a manifesto for Marinetti's movement Futurism, advocating a sweeping revolution in arts and letters. With his wide-ranging interests and enthusiasms, Apollinaire became the preeminent French spokesman for artists of the avant-garde.

In poetry as well, Apollinaire led the way into new territory. He introduced a whole range of imagery drawn from science and the machine; he made spoken conversation the basis for poems, found bold new uses for the traditional ballad form, and experimented with rhymed free verse. In his *Calligrammes*, he designed a visual poetry that playfully made shapes out of words. His fame as a poet grew slowly, and not until after World War II was his major collection *Alcools* given its due, Albert Camus praising it as one of two most important poetry books of the past century, along with the *Illuminations* of Arthur Rimbaud.

Apollinaire has been called a foreigner who materialized in Paris out of nowhere, yet his beginnings have been carefully traced. An illegitimate child, he was born in Rome on August 26, 1880, given a Catholic baptism, and christened Wilhelm Albert Wladimir Alexander Apollinaris de Kostrowitzky, taking the last name of his mother. She, Angeliska (or Angélique) de Kostrowitzky, was from an ancient family of minor Polish nobility. His maternal grandfather, having taken part in an unsuccessful insurrection against the Russian occupation of Poland, had found political refuge in Italy and a position at the Vatican court. For a long time the identity of Apollinaire's father, rumored to be a high-ranking prelate, was a mystery; but thanks to biographer Marcel Adéma we now know that he was Francesco d'Aspermont, an Italian army officer from a wealthy and respected family. Eventually, he broke off his scandalous liaison with Angélique, and she and her two boys relocated to Monaco. There and in Cannes and Nice, Guillaume received good schooling. After his mother began living with a new protector, the family moved to Paris in Guillaume's nineteenth year. Only in 1902, when he began placing poems in magazines, did Wilhelm Kostrowitzky adopt the more Gallic-sounding pen name Guillaume Apollinaire.

A book lover who liked to search through the stalls of *bouquinistes* by the Seine, a frequenter of museums and libraries, Apollinaire was no doubt acquainted with some of the bestiaries of the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries. The most celebrated ancestor of such works was the *Physiologus,* a book of forty-nine beasts thought to date back to a Greek manuscript written between the second and fifth centuries. It was translated into Latin in the eighth century, and among those works chosen by monastic scribes to copy, its popularity was probably second only to that of the Bible. Subsequent bestiaries drew from it, while adding other creatures. According to the scholar and author M. R. James, it "may be reckoned as one of the leading picture-books of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries."

Although their fanciful descriptions of beasts and birds, since corrected by modern naturalists who rely on observation, strike the present-day reader as droll, the medieval bestiaries are serious works of natural history. Moreover, they strive to give moral and religious instruction. With minds fond of allegory, their authors perceived lessons to be learned from the natural world. The whale with sweet breath lures little fishes into his mouth and swallows them, much as the Devil lures sinners. The lion cub is delivered stillborn, then after lying dead for three days is brought to life by the father lion's breath—in which we may read the story of the death and resurrection of Christ. Apollinaire, with his far-from-medieval mind, nevertheless finds certain truths implied by many of the beasts in his series. He describes the horse in terms of allegory, pulling a coach driven by Fate, using for reins the poet's verses. Like the precious ivory of the elephant's tusks, melodious words grow in the mouth of the poet. The nibbling mouse signifies the passage of time; lions are fallen kings, and blood-sucking fleas, demanding lovers. In Apollinaire's natural world, like that of the twelfth century, creatures instruct us: the caterpillar sets the poet an example of ceaseless striving, the peacock who shows off his plumes reveals his own embarrassing deficiency, pointing to the dangers of pride. Like the author of the *Physiologus*, Apollinaire sees the legendary sirens as creatures of the natural world.

Certain poems in *The Bestiary, or Procession of Orpheus* express pious sentiments, in particular, "Dove," "Ox," and the third of the poems entitled "Orpheus," and yet Apollinaire had strayed far from the Catholicism of his upbringing. His friend and supporter André Billy describes the poet's philosophy as neither mystical nor materialist, but rather that of an agnostic who respects magic and classical mythology. If we can take at face value his "Zone" in *Alcools,* Apollinaire maintains his respect for Christianity and its icons as well. In this major poem, the speaker praises Christianity for remaining new and hails Pope Pius X as "the most modern European." In other images, reflecting the Futurists' fondness for machines, he calls Christian faith "simple as the hangars of the airport" and envisions a glorious Christ flying to heaven higher and faster than any aviator. But these references seem more playful than devout. Perhaps, in referring to Jesus and the Virgin in the *Bestiary*, Apollinaire sought to make his poems echo those works of medieval piety.

The medieval bestiaries' combination of words and art must have appealed to Apollinaire. Illuminated manuscripts of some medieval bestiaries display colorful illustrations by a limner, the artist who worked on the manuscript copied by a scribe. For his own *Bestiary*, Apollinaire counted on illustrations by an outstanding new artist. His first choice was his close friend Pablo Picasso. The inspiration for the *Bestiary* may well have been the drawings of animals that Apollinaire saw scattered about Picasso's Paris studio in 1906. The long, mutually nourishing friendship between the two men has been chronicled extensively by Peter Read in *Picasso & Apollinaire*, with ample evidence that in 1907 Picasso played seriously with the idea of illustrating the *Bestiary*, filling pages of notebooks with sketches of creatures, only a few of them those that Apollinaire had chosen for his poems. But the collaboration was not to be. Apollinaire wanted woodcuts, which medium he had earlier praised as "the kind of engraving whose style best fits a printed page." Indeed, the first book he signed with his full name, the prose fiction of 1909, *L'Enchanteur pourrissant* (The Decaying Magician), boasted woodcut illustrations by another painter friend, André Derain. Picasso experimented, as if he contemplated doing the job. He went so far as to transfer two of his dashed-off birds to a block of wood and print them, but apparently did no more, seemingly not tempted by the time-consuming prospect of engraving thirty same-sized illustrations. Read has traced the artist's involvement with work of his own, in particular the major painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which required many studies, made in the same sketchbooks as his attempts to illustrate the *Bestiary*. In the end, after a disappointing five years of delay, Apollinaire turned over the assignment to Raoul Dufy.

It was a fortunate compromise. Apollinaire admired Dufy, and in reviewing his work in the Salon des Indépendents in 1908, he had praised the little-known young artist for seeking perfection. In August 1910, he wrote to him, saying, "I am certain that with your masterful art and with your cultivated sensibility, you will be inspired, seek the ideal, and that your work will be a marvel." Dufy responded by delivering one of the finest and most ambitious works of his career. When the job was done, Apollinaire wrote a leaflet to announce the book's publication and solicit subscriptions, making generous use of superlatives:

> The subtle poems of *The Bestiary, or Procession of Orpheus* by Guillaume Apollinaire make up one of the most various, enchanting, and polished poetic works of our new generation of lyricists. This collection, quite modern in tone, is related in inspiration to the

> greatest works of human civilization. The very spirit that moved the poet also inspired the artist Raoul Dufy, who, as is well known, is among the most skilled and original artistic revolutionaries whom France is honored to have today.
>
> To print by hand is a slow process that calls for an immense amount of care. Only such care results in a flawless product. Bibliophiles and connoisseurs of arts and letters will thank the publisher Deplanche for making available to them a book whose fine typography is assured by the celebrated firm of Gauthier-Villars.
>
> *The Bestiary, or Procession of Orpheus*, deserves to be regarded as one of the choicest and most beautiful books of our day.

Handsomely produced indeed, the slim volume appeared in 1911 with a dedication to Elémir Bourges, a prominent novelist of the day. Presumably, Apollinaire wanted to thank Bourges for a considerable favor, for earlier the novelist had recommended Apollinaire's collection of fantastic short stories *L'Hérésiarque et Cie* (The Heresiarch and Co.) to the publisher P. V. Stock. Both Apollinaire and the publisher thought that the book might win the prestigious Goncourt Prize of 1910, since Bourges was a member of the Goncourt Academy, but in the final balloting the novelist supported another candidate.

If Apollinaire had expected to profit from sales of the *Bestiary*, his hopes were again dashed. Fewer than half the 120 signed copies were sold at the time, and before long the rest were consigned to a second-hand book dealer. Today, original copies are rare and high-priced. Possible reasons for the book's failure at the time may be inferred. Neither Apollinaire nor Dufy was then as celebrated as they were later to become; moreover, proper bibliophiles may have put down Apollinaire as a notorious museum-robber and pornographer. The former charge had been dismissed, but there were uncomfortable facts behind it. Pablo Picasso had bought an Iberian statue stolen from the Louvre, and the thief had given him a second one as a gift. When in August 1911, a different thief made off with the Mona Lisa, the authorities launched a citywide investigation. Picasso grew worried that the authorities would discover his stolen goods, and Apollinaire helpfully took the statues off his hands and delivered them to a newspaper for return to the museum. This friendly act aroused the suspicions of the police, who on the night of September 7 arrested the poet, hauled him away to the Palais de Justice, and charged him as an accomplice in the Mona Lisa heist. After five nights in jail, he was cleared and released, but a cloud of infamy lingered over him.

That Apollinaire had been a pornographer he did not deny. In 1900, at a time when he was starving, he said, he had churned out an erotic novel for 100 francs (about U.S.$35). In 1907, again needing funds, he had hacked out two longer works, *Les Mémoires d'un jeune Don Juan* (A Young Don Juan's Memoirs) and *Les Onze Mille Verges* (The Eleven Thousand Strokes, published in English as *The Debauched Hospodar*). Picasso, a fallible critic of literature, thought this outrageous novel Apollinaire's finest work. Its main character, a dissolute prince who explores every perversion, is eventually thrashed to a pulp by an eleven-thousand-man Japanese regiment. Though the poet signed these two potboilers "G.A.," their authorship was disguised only thinly. For a time he also earned his living by editing erotic works, some of which he translated from the Italian, and he assembled the first anthology of the writings of the Marquis de Sade.

Four poems that Apollinaire decided to excise from the finished *Bestiary* have been called pornographic, with little justification. To be sure, they might have offended some readers had he let them stand, and apparently he had second thoughts about them. They were printed posthumously, and for the sake of completeness I have included these curiosities in a separate section (pages 65–67).

Such items would indeed have seemed out of place. The *Besti-*

ary in its final form has a lofty and inspiring theme, centered around the figure of Orpheus. This legendary hero meant much to Apollinaire, who organized a group of young painters—Léger, Delaunay, Duchamp, Picabia—into a movement he called Orphism. And as the first poet, Orpheus, whose lyre cast a spell over the listening animals, seems a stand-in for Apollinaire himself. And so Orpheus, first depicted with magician's robes, lyre in hand, in full-frontal nude exposure, stands at the beginning of the series and recurs in three more poems titled "Orphée." "He helps the French poet to tame his animals," Michael Schmidt has observed, "in epigrams that contain but do not confine them." As Apollinaire recalls in his note on "The Tortoise," the first poet's lyre, given him by Mercury, was said to have been fashioned from a tortoise's shell. In this poem the poet speaks in the persona of Orpheus, as perhaps he does in other poems ("Horse," "Hare," "Elephant," "Caterpillar," "Grasshopper") referring to his art and sometimes boasting of it. Orpheus and the beasts he charmed are dwellers in the same world. The musicality of Apollinaire's lines was later to be demonstrated by a younger artist, the composer Francis Poulenc, who recast more than a dozen of Apollinaire's poems into effective songs, and even wrote an opera based on the poet's surreal play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (The Breasts of Tiresias, 1947). In 1928, Poulenc turned to the *Bestiary* and recorded his settings for six of its poems: "Tibetan Goat," "Dromedary," "Grasshopper," "Dolphin," "Crawfish," and "Carp," with himself as pianist and with mezzo-soprano Claire Croiza. As a self-styled modern Orpheus sounding his lyre, Apollinaire might well have approved such latter-day use of his material.

No wonder, then, that the *Bestiary* seems part autobiography. Apollinaire, who once declared that his every poem reflected his own life, seems often to speak directly and personally. He devotes "Tibetan Goat" and "Dove" to praising the woman he loves; in "Dove," the Mary he says he hopes to marry is the vivacious Creole

Marie Laurencin, with whom he had a close but tumultuous liaison from 1907 until 1912. In "Cat" he sets forth his prescription for a happy life. He requires a congenial wife, books, a cat, and not least, faithful friends. Apollinaire's gift for friendship gave him a large roster of close companions and amicable acquaintances among the writers and artists of Paris. Though in "Ibis" he looks forward to death, in "Ox," the last of the series, he assures his friends that they all will reunite in paradise. We can hardly be sure how many of his confessions to believe, but in other poems, he frankly describes himself as racked with indecision ("Crawfish"), having wasted his life ("Mouse"), and given to sadistic cruelty ("Devilfish"). Apparently, the poet has become a creature in his own zoological gallery.

As soon as war broke out in 1914, Apollinaire, who as a foreigner might have avoided military service, volunteered for the French army. At first the recruiting offices were flooded, but by applying in Nice, he got in, and he was soon assigned to the infantry. He saw action at the front in muddy trenches, and worked his way up through the ranks to a commission as a second lieutenant, for a time commanding a battery of artillery. In March 1916, near Berry-au-Bac in Picardy, a piece of shrapnel passed through his helmet and penetrated his skull. Hospitalized, then sent back in Paris but not discharged from the army, he was reassigned to serve as a press censor. Still, he maintained his involvement in the arts, and in 1917, he supervised the first production of *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. In his last year, 1918, he published two remarkable books: his good-humored prose memoirs *Le Flâneur des deux rives* (The Saunterer Along Two Riverbanks) and the collection of poems *Calligrammes*, in which he was finally able to unite words and graphic art. Amid more conventional poems, some in rhymed quatrains and classical alexandrine couplets, he playfully casts poems into shapes, such as those of a mandolin, lips, spears of rain, a necktie, a watch, and the Eiffel Tower. In other experimental poems, he plays with sizes of type, or combines type and handwriting. And in all the poems, observing a tenet stated in his Futurist manifesto, he dispenses with punctuation.

Although late in life he had had a passionate affair with Countess Louise de Coligny-Châtillon, celebrated in his "Poèmes à Lou," and had been engaged for a time to Madeleine Pagès, a young girl he had met while still serving in the infantry, those intense loves were not to last. In March 1918, he married Jacqueline "Ruby" Kolb, the "Pretty Redhead" of his poem in *Calligrammes*, who tended the ailing poet through his final days. On November 9, 1918, hours before the Armistice that officially ended the war, weakened by his head wound and a lung condition due to poison gas in the trenches, Apollinaire died in Paris at the age of thirty-eight, a victim of the Spanish Flu pandemic sweeping the world.

He had done enough. Some commentators downgrade the *Bestiary* as immature work; even the sympathetic Marcel Adéma calls it "as yet not very representative of [Apollinaire's] talent." Yet the poet had already matured. Around the same time he was composing this series and even earlier, Apollinaire was writing and saving up poems that would eventually go into his greatest collection, *Alcools*. Perhaps the *Bestiary* can be likened to a necklace strung with gems, each small in size but adding up to a spectacular entirety. Qualities of Apollinaire's later poetry are present in these miniatures: humor and wit, playfulness, love of myths and marvels, fascination with the natural world, skillful exposition in language that seems casual, deft rhyming, surprising imagery, considerable learning worn lightly. Anyone seeking a clear and enjoyable introduction to the complex and impressive body of Apollinaire's work need look no further than here.

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About This Translation

Apollinaire's love lyric "Le Pont Mirabeau" first challenged me in 1955–56 when I was a student in Paris on the GI Bill, and over the years I have printed several failures to persuade it into adequate English. The *Bestiary*, too, has been a long-term challenge. Poems so concise, resembling casual speech though cast in strict rhymes and various meters, invite a translator's despair. Yet it has seemed essential to observe these brief poems' forms, to give some idea of their music. To render them into free verse would be to offer little more than a crib.

It may be objected that rhyming forces a translator to betray the meaning of the originals, high-handedly adding or subtracting things so that the rhymes work out. But I think that such a charge can be leveled only at the translator who knocks off work too soon. I cannot pretend to similar mastery, but certainly Richard Wilbur's inspired versions of the plays of Molière and Racine, and Michael De Palma's remarkable *Divine Comedy*, preserve the sense of their originals while staying faithful to their forms. I have tried, therefore, to bring over Apollinaire's meanings in rhyme schemes suggesting his own. From the French texts, the reader can see how far I have fallen short.

I am grateful to William Jay Smith for first publishing four of these versions in his anthology *Poems from France,* to Robert L. Barth for including two in a chapbook, *French Leave,* and to two distinguished translators, Keith Waldrop and Rosmarie Waldrop, for their encouragement. Rosmarie Waldrop came to my aid when one of the deleted poems, "L'Araignée," quite baffled me. Peter Dreyer caught egregious errors and made valuable suggestions. Greg Nicholl gave essential help and advice.

And, displaying saintly patience, Dorothy M. Kennedy lived uncomplainingly with me and this knotty project.

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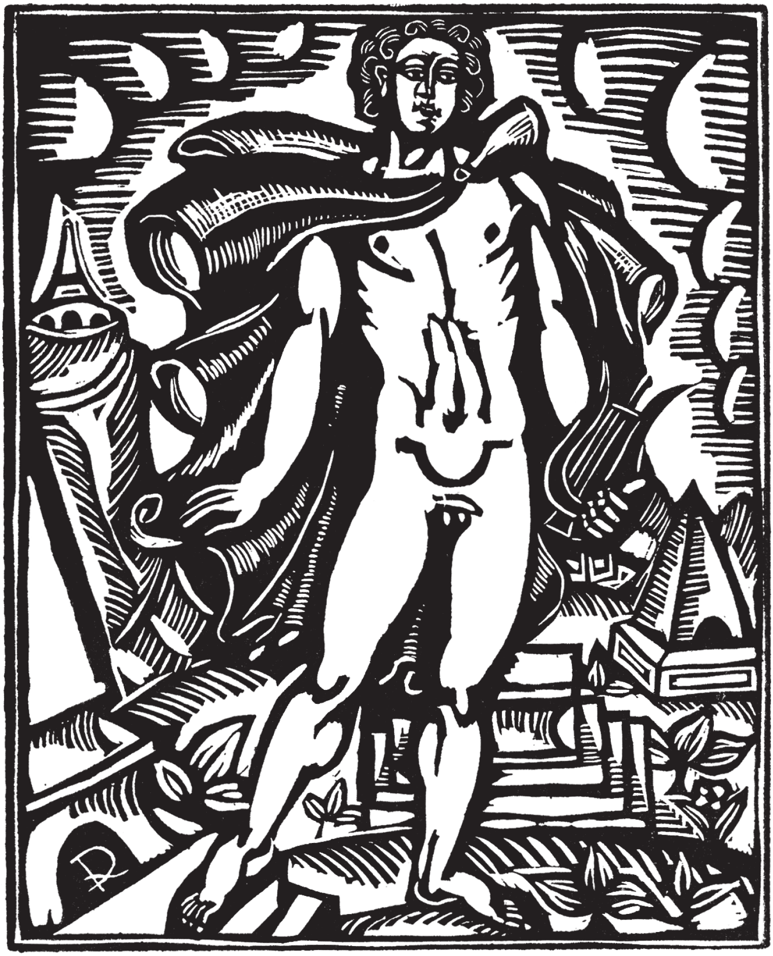
ORPHÉE

Admirez le pouvoir insigne
Et la noblesse de la ligne:
Elle est la voix que la lumière fit entendre
Et dont parle Hermès Trismégiste en son Pimandre.

ORPHEUS

Admire his inborn might,
His form of noble grandeur!
Here is the voice heard at the birth of light,
As Trismegistus says in his Pimander.



La tortue

Du Thrace magique, ô délire!
Mes doigts sûrs font sonner la lyre.
Les animaux passent aux sons
De ma tortue, de mes chansons.

Tortoise

O madness from magical Thrace!
My sure fingers fondle the lyre.
Beasts go by in time to my songs,
To the sound of my tortoise's pace.

Le cheval

Mes durs rêves formels sauront te chevaucher,
Mon destin au char d’or sera ton beau cocher
Qui pour rênes tiendra tendus à frénésie,
Mes vers, les parangons de toute poésie.

Horse

My strait-laced dreams know how to straddle you,
And driving, comely in a golden coach will be
My fate, his frenzied, tight-tugged reins my lines,
Paragons of all poetry.

La chèvre du Tibet

Les poils de cette chèvre et même
Ceux d'or pour qui prit tant de peine
Jason, ne valent rien aux prix
Des cheveux dont je suis épris.

Tibetan Goat

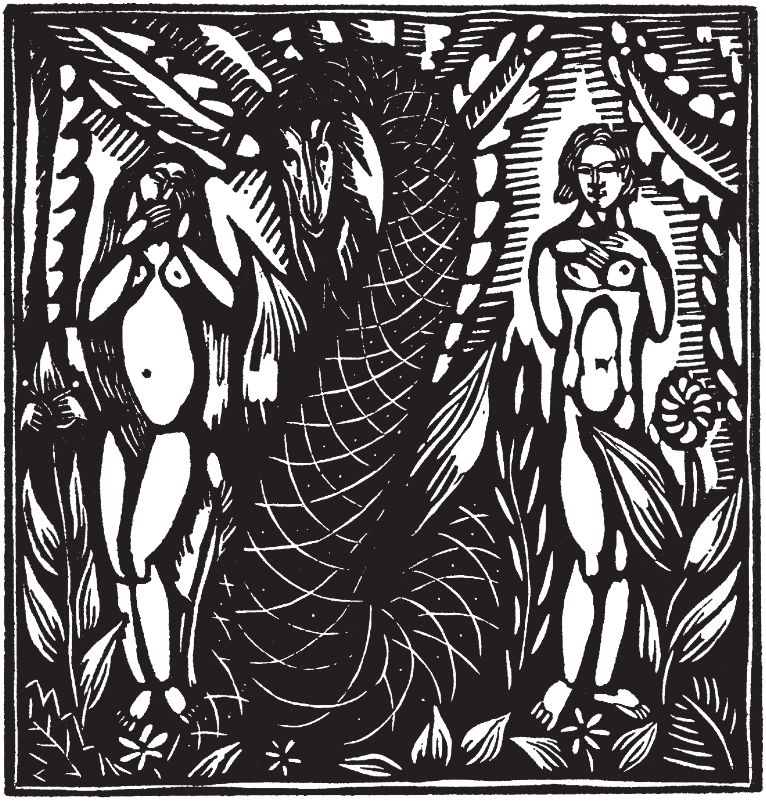
This goat's silken hair, and even
The golden fleece Jason won
By his labors—ah, they're worth less
Than the locks of my own loved one.

Le serpent

Tu t'acharnes sur la beauté.
Et quelles femmes ont été
Victimes de ta cruauté!
Eve, Eurydice, Cléopâtre;
J'en connais encor trois ou quatre.

Serpent

You've set your sights on beauty.
What beauties have had to be
Victims of your cruelty!
Eurydice, Cleopatra, Eve—and more
Of their kind. I know three or four.



Le chat

Je souhaite dans ma maison:
Une femme ayant sa raison,
Un chat passant parmi les livres,
Des amis de toute saison
Sans lesquels je ne peut pas vivre.

Cat

I hope I may have in my house
A sensible right-minded spouse,
A cat stepping over the books,
Loyal friends always about
Whom I couldn't live without.

Le lion

O lion, malheureuse image
Des rois chus lamentablement,
Tu ne nais maintenant qu'en cage
A Hambourg, chez les Allemands.

Lion

O lion, unfortunate emblem
Of kings deposed and forlorn,
Nowadays Germany's Hamburg zoo
Is the only place you're born.

LE LIÈVRE

Ne sois pas lascif et peureux
Comme le lièvre et l'amoureux.
Mais que toujours son cerveau soit
La hase pleine qui conçoit.

HARE

Don't leap guiltily for cover
Like the buck hare and his lover,
But let your mind forever lie
Like the fat doe hare and fructify.

Le lapin

Je connais un autre connin
Que tout vivant je voudrais prendre.
Sa garenne est parmi les thym
Des vallons du pays de Tendre.

Rabbit

I know a lively coney
I'd like to take in hand.
His warren is the thyme fields
Of the vales of Tender Land.

Le dromadaire

Avec ses quatre dromadaires
Don Pedro d'Alfaroubeira
Courut le monde et l'admira.
Il fit ce que je voudrais faire
Si j'avais quatre dromadaires.

Dromedary

With his dromedaries four
Don Pedro of Alfarubera
Wandered the world and savored it.
He did just what I'd like to do
Had I four dromedaries too.

Le souris

Belles journées, souris du temps,
Vous rongez peu à peu ma vie.
Dieu! Je vais avoir vingt-huit ans,
Et mal vécus, à mon envie.

Mouse

Fine days, time's mice, bit by bit
You nibble my life away.
Lord! I'll have lived to twenty-eight,
Lived badly, I should say.

L'éléphant

Comme un éléphant son ivoire,
J'ai en bouche un bien précieux.
Pourpre mort! . . . J'achète ma gloire
Au prix des mots mélodieux.

Elephant

As an elephant his ivory,
My own mouth sprouts its treasure.
Dignified death! . . . I'll buy my fame
With words in rhyme and measure.

Orphée

Regardez cette troupe infecte
Aux mille pattes, aux cent yeux:
Rotifères, cirons, insectes
Et microbes plus merveilleux
Que les sept merveilles du monde
Et le palais de Rosemonde!

Orpheus

Behold this vile, infesting mob
Thousand-legged, hundred-eyed:
Animalcules, insects, mites,
And microbes more marvelous
Than the seven wonders of the world
And Rosemunda's palace!

La chenille

Le travail mène à la richesse.
Pauvres poètes, travaillons!
La chenille en peinant sans cesse
Devient le riche papillon.

Caterpillar

Toil leads to wealth. Poor poets,
Let's toil on! By and by
The worm that keeps on striving turns
To a monarch butterfly.

La mouche

Nos mouches savant des chansons
Que leur apprirent en Norvège
Les mouches ganiques qui sont
Les divinités de la neige.

Housefly

Songs they've learned in Norway
Are the songs our houseflies know,
Taught them by wonder-working flies,
Divinities of snow.

La puce

Puces, amis, amantes même,
Qu'ils sont cruels ceux qui nous aiment!
Tout notre sang coule pour eux.
Les bien-aimés sont malheureux.

Flea

Fleas—friends, even lovers,
How cruel are those who suck
Our blood in loving us, and those
Best loved are out of luck.

LA SAUTERELLE

Voici la fine sauterelle,
La nourriture de saint Jean.
Puissent mes vers être comme elle,
Le régal des meilleures gens.

GRASSHOPPER

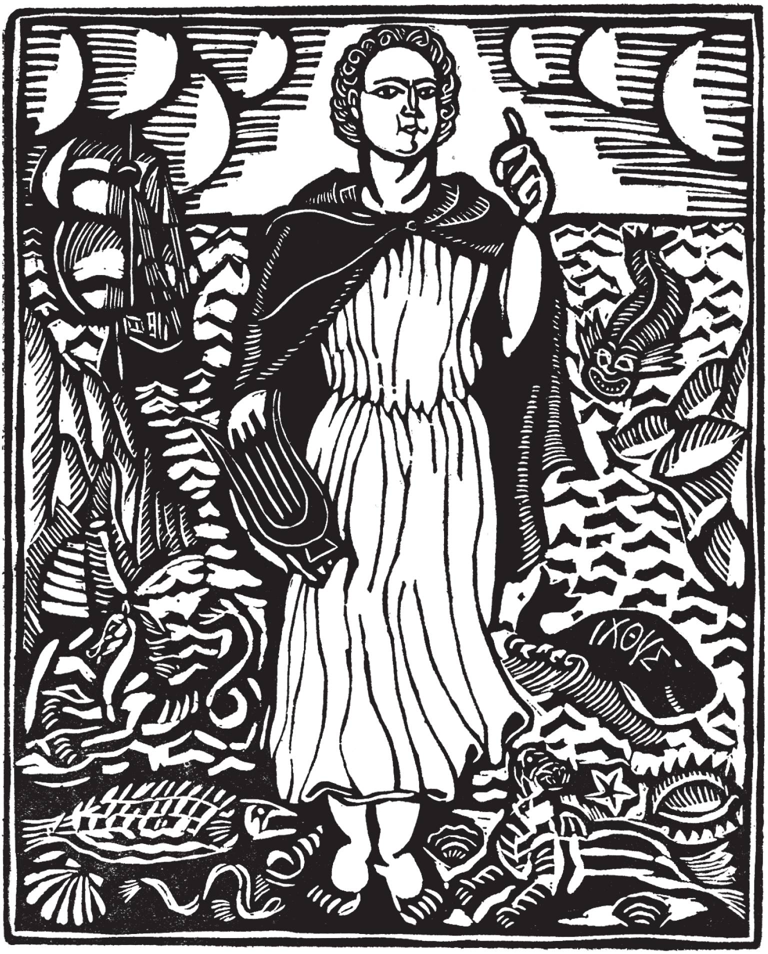
Here's the delectable grasshopper,
The diet of Saint John.
Be like her, my verses,
What the best folk nibble on.

ORPHÉE

Que ton Coeur soit l'appât et le ciel, la piscine!
Car, pécheur, quel poisson d'eau douce ou bien marine
Egale-t-il, et par la forme et la saveur,
Ce beau poisson divin qu'est JESUS, Mon Sauveur?

ORPHEUS

May your heart be the bait and the heavens your pool!
For, sinner, what fish of fresh water or sea
Can equal in fair form and savor
That divine fish, JESUS, My Savior?


ΙΧΘΥΣ

Le dauphin

Dauphins, vous jouez dans la mer,
Mais le flot est toujours amer.
Parfois, ma joie éclate-t-elle?
La vie est encore cruelle.

Dolphin

Though, dolphins, you sport in the sea,
Ever bitter is the surf.
At times, does my joy burst free?
And yet merciless is life.

Le poulpe

Jetant son encre vers les cieux,
Suçant le sang de ce qu'il aime
Et le trouvant délicieux,
Ce monstre inhumain, c'est moi-même.

Devilfish

Squirting his ink to the sky,
Sucking his lovers' blood,
Finding the taste of it good,
This inhuman monster is I.

La méduse

Méduses, malheureuses têtes
Aux chevelures violettes
Vous vous plaisez dans les tempêtes,
Et je m'y plais comme vous faites.

Jellyfish

Jellyfish, miserable heads
With your violet-tinted hair,
You take delight in storms,
A pleasure I too share.

L'écrevisse

Incertitude, ô mes délices
Vous et moi nous nous en allons
Comme s'en vont les écrevisses,
A reculons, à reculons.

Crawfish

Incertitude, my secret joy,
To travel you and I
Do as does the craw
And withdraw and withdraw.

La carpe

Dans vos viviers, dans vos étangs,
Carpes, que vous vivez longtemps!
Est-ce que la mort vous oublie,
Poissons de la mélancolie.

Carp

In your marshes, in your ponds,
Carp, how long you live!
Have you slipped Death's mind,
Fishes of despond.

ORPHÉE

La femelle de l’alcyon,
L’Amour, les volantes Sirènes,
Savent de mortelles chansons
Dangereuses et inhumaines.
N’oyez pas ces oiseaux maudits,
Mais les Anges du paradis.

ORPHEUS

The fabulous kingfisher queen,
Love, and the flying Sirens,
Know songs that can kill,
Dangerous and inhuman.
Don’t listen to those cursèd birds,
But to the Choir of Heaven.

Les sirènes

Saché-je d'où provient, Sirènes, votre ennui
Quand vous vous lamentez, au large, dans la nuit?
Mer, je suit comme toi, plein de voix machinées
Et mes vaisseaux chantants se nomment les années.

Sirens

Sirens, do I not share your discontent
When in the night you far and wide lament?
Sea, I'm like you: machined cries fill my ears.
My vessels sing. They call themselves the years.

La colombe

Colombe, l'amour et l'esprit
Qui engendrâtes Jésus-Christ,
Comme vous j'aime une Marie.
Qu'avec elle je me marie.

Dove

Like you, O sacred Dove
Who begat Christ, I love
A woman whose name is Mary.
May she be the one I marry.

Le paon

En faisant la roue, cet oiseau,
Dont le pennage traîne à terre,
Apparaît encore plus beau,
Mais se découvre le derrière.

Peacock

When opening his fanlike tail
This bird whose plumes behind him trail
Looks lovelier than when it's shut,
But he reveals his naked butt.

Le hibou

Mon pauvre coeur est un hibou
Qu'on cloue, qu'on décloue, qu'on recloue.
De sang, d'ardeur, il est à bout.
Tout ceux qui m'aiment, je les loue.

Owl

My sad heart is a hoot owl nailed,
Torn loose and then again impaled.
Its blood and ardor end their days.
All those who love me, those I praise.

Ibis

Oui, j'irai dans l'ombre terreuse
O mort certaine, ainsi soit-il!
Latin mortel, parole affreuse,
Ibis, oiseau des bords du Nil.

Ibis

Yes, I'll go to the shadowy underworld,
O certain death, in a while.
Deadly Latin its hideous name,
Ibis, bird of the banks of the Nile.

Le bœuf

Ce chérubin dit la louange
Du paradis, où, près des anges,
Nous revivrons, mes chers amis,
Quand le bon Dieu l’aura permis.

Ox

This cherub praises heaven, where
One of these days, with angels near,
To live again, dear friends, we’ll rouse
Whenever the good Lord allows.

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Apollinaire excised from the *Bestiary* two quatrains in dubious taste. Rediscovered, they were printed in a limited-edition *Supplément* in 1931.

Le Condor
Cet oiseau s'appelle condor
Et que les filles ne l'ont elles!
Savez-vous quoi? Il n'est pas d'or
L'anneau merveilleux d'Hans Carvel.

Condor
This bird is called the condor.
May girls all have such a thing!
Don't you know why? There is no gold
In Hans Carvel's marvelous ring.

The bawdy tale of Hans Carvel has been retold by many authors, among them Rabelais in *Pantagruel*, Ariosto in his *Satires*, and Jean de La Fontaine and Matthew Prior in verse. It tells how an old man married to a young wife dreams that the devil gives him a wonderful ring that will render him potent again. Slipping it on, he wakes to his wife's angry complaint that he has thrust his finger into her—as Prior puts it—"God knows where." Apollinaire puns on the bird's name (*con d'or*), but he dropped this item and replaced it with "Serpent."

LE MORPION

Imitons la ténacité
De cet insecte qu’on méprise.
Dames, messieurs qui vous grattez
Il ne lâchera jamais prise.

CRAB LOUSE

Let’s copy the tenacity
Of this bug that we value low.
Ladies and gents, though you scratch him
He never will let go.

Not certainly part of the original *Bestiary*, but looking suspiciously like spare parts left over from it, two other quatrains appeared in a periodical, *Les Veillées du Lapin agile*, in 1919.

LE SINGE
Lorsqu'à la cave sa main serve
Porte la viande de conserve,
On peut sans fouler la méninge
Dire: l'homme descend du singe.

APE
Feeding himself by hand, he scrapes
Meat from a can. It doesn't strain
The membrane of a human brain
To say man came down from the apes.

L'ARAIGNÉE
On sait même chez le Papou
Que la trop credule Araignée
S'est avec un rasoir saignée
Pour les yeux enjôleurs du Pou.

SPIDER
Even a Papuan knows
That the credulous lady Spider
Lets a playful seducer, the Louse,
As though with a razor bleed her.

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Le Singe

Lorsqu'à la cave sa main serve
Porte la viande de conserve,
On peut sans fouler la méninge
Dire: l'homme descend du singe.

Ape

Feeding himself by hand, he scrapes
Meat from a can. It doesn't strain
The membrane of a human brain
To say man came down from the apes.

L'Araignée

On sait même chez le Papou
Que la trop credule Araignée
S'est avec un rasoir saignée
Pour les yeux enjôleurs du Pou.

Spider

Even a Papuan knows
That the credulous lady Spider
Lets a playful seducer, the Louse,
As though with a razor bleed her.

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Notes

Apollinaire supplied notes to ten of the poems in his Bestiary. *These are given below in Roman type. Additional notes, in italics, are the translator's.*

p. 2 ORPHEUS

Admire his inborn might,
His form of noble grandeur!

This passage praises the strong line visible in these images, splendid decorations of this poetic entertainment.

Here is the voice heard at the birth of light,
As Trismegistus says in his Pimander.

"Soon," one reads in the Pimander, "shadows fell . . . and out of them came an inarticulate cry that seemed the very voice of light."

Is not this "voice of light" the craft of drawing, that is to say, the line? And when light fully expresses itself, all things take on color. Properly speaking, painting is luminous language.

Pimander is a chapter of the Corpus Hermeticum, one of the ancient Hermetic books, works of magic and metaphysics attributed to Thoth, Egyptian god of wisdom, whose Greek name was Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes the thrice-great). Perhaps a Greek translation of a yet more ancient text, it became a kind of bible for alchemists of the Middle Ages. The chapter tells how Tristmegistus, self-described as a philosopher, king, and immortal, converses in a vision with Pimander, the Nous or principle of creation.

p. 4 TORTOISE

. . . from magical Thrace!

Thrace was the birthplace of Orpheus. This sublime poet played a lyre that Mercury had given him, fashioned from a tortoise shell, leather binding, two wooden branches, a bridge, and sheep's gut strings. Mercury gave such lyres to Apollo and Amphion as well. Whenever Orpheus played and sang, savage beasts came to listen to his song. Orpheus invented every science and every art. Trained in magic, he could see into the future and with Christian foresight predicted the coming of the SAVIOR.

Apollinaire here professes doctrines of Orphism, or the Orphic Mysteries, the Greek religious cult, dating back to the sixth century B.C.E., based on sacred poems attributed to Orpheus. The figure of the mythic poet who charmed beasts with his lyre was seen as a prophet of Christianity.

p. 6 HORSE

My strait-laced dreams know how to straddle you,
And driving, comely in a golden coach will be
My fate . . .

The first to ride Pegasus was Bellerophon when he rode forth to attack the Chimera. There are a great many chimeras today, and before doing battle with one, the most inimical to poetry, it might be well to bridle Pegasus, even put a tight harness on him, if you know what I mean.

What does the poet mean? My guess is based on Apollinaire's expressed fondness for melodious words (in the poem "Cat"), and indeed, on his choice of rhyme and meter for the entire Bestiary. *Perhaps he advises poets to adopt such formal controls when starting to write. Poets, he also suggests, ought to tell the truth, and combat fanciful illusions. In Greek mythology, Bellerophon, mounted on the winged horse*

Pegasus, slew the Chimera, a bizarre combination of lion, goat, and dragon.

p. 10 SERPENT

This quatrain refers again to the legend of Orpheus. The nymph Eurydice, whom Orpheus failed to rescue from Hades, died from a snake's bite. The other two serpents, to be sure, were suicidal Cleopatra's asp and Eve's talking tempter.

p. 16 HARE

Like the fat doe hare and fructify.

In the family of the hare, superfetation is possible.

p. 18 RABBIT

Tender Land, or Pays de Tendre, did not originate with Apollinaire. This imaginary realm was first depicted in a map illustrating a romantic novel by Madeleine de Scudéry, Clélie *(1654–60). Representing in allegorical form the stages of a love affair, it charted the course a lover might follow along the River of Inclination through villages such as Pretty Verse (Jolie-Vers) and Billet-Doux, avoiding the Lake of Indifference and the Dangerous Sea where passions stormed. Alluding to this well-known legend as did Apollinaire, the composer Gabriel Pierné later entitled a piece of chamber music "Voyage au pays de tendre" (1935).*

p. 20 DROMEDARY

With his dromedaries four,
Don Pedro of Alfarubera
Wandered the world and savored it.

The celebrated travel account, *History of the Infante D. Pedro of Portugal, in which is related what occurred on his journey to seven regions of the earth, written by Gomez de Santistevan, one of twelve who escorted* *the Prince,* tells how the Infante of Portugal, Don Pedro of Alfarubera, set out with twelve companions to visit the seven corners of the world. Sharing four dromedaries, the travelers rode through Spain, then Norway, and from there went on to Babylon and the Holy Land. The Portuguese prince also visited the land of Prester John, and after three years and four months returned home.

Infante *is the title given to a younger son of a Spanish or Portuguese king, not his heir. In the twelfth-century legend of Prester John, this Christian king was said to rule a utopian country in Asia, a kind of Shangri-la.*

p. 26 ORPHEUS

And Rosemunda's palace!

About this palace, built as a testimony to the king of England's love for his mistress, here is a stanza from a mournful old song, author unknown to me:

To shelter Rosemunda from the hate
Borne her by the queen,
The king had such a palace built
As never had been seen.

For Apollinaire, the name Rosemunda or Rosemonde seems to have held a persistent fascination. In his later poem, "Rosemonde" in Alcools, *the speaker bestows the name on a beautiful woman he admires from afar as he searches for the Rose of the World.*

p. 30 HOUSEFLY

. . . wonder-working flies,
Divinities of snow.

Not all these flies appear in the form of snowflakes, but many have been tamed by Lapp or Finnish sorcerers and obey them.

The magicians hand them down from father to son and keep them cooped up in a box, where they stay invisible, ready to swarm forth to torment robbers, all the while chanting magical words, like themselves immortal.

p. 34 GRASSHOPPER

Here's the delectable grasshopper,
The diet of Saint John.

"And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins, and he did eat locusts and wild honey." Mark 1:6.

The diet of Saint John may have been vegetarian. The word locust *can also mean "carob-pod," according to the* Oxford English Dictionary*.*

p. 48 ORPHEUS

The fabulous kingfisher queen,
Love, and the flying Sirens,
Know songs that can kill,
Dangerous and inhuman.

Sailors, hearing the song of the female kingfisher, made ready to die, unless it were about mid-December, the time when the birds build nests and a calm sea was expected. As for Love and the Sirens, those marvelous birds sing so sweetly that the listener's very life seems not too high a price to pay for such music.

In the episode of Ulysses and the Sirens in the Odyssey, Homer does not enable the Sirens to fly; but in mythology and in art, they are often represented as half-women, half-birds. One version of the story of Jason and the Golden Fleece has Orpheus saving the Argonauts from being lured to destruction by the Sirens' song: he plays his lyre so masterfully that the sailors listen to him instead.

p. 58 Ibis

Perhaps Apollinaire associates the ibis with death and the underworld from the fact that ibises were sometimes mummified and buried with the dead, and depicted in Egyptian tomb paintings.

p. 60 Ox

This cherub . . .

Among the celestial hierarchy dedicated to the service and glory of God, we can distinguish beings of unknown form, of the most stunning beauty. Cherubim are winged oxen, not the least bit monstrous.

Whenever the good Lord allows.

Those who labor at the craft of poetry seek nothing but perfection, the nature of God Himself, nor is there anything else they so love. And this divine goodness and supreme perfection, must these rewards evade those whose lives have no other aim but to reveal and glorify them? That would seem to me impossible. Poets have the right to hope that after death they will find that missing joy which a full knowledge of God will bring—that is to say, that they will behold sublime beauty.

About the Translator

X. J. Kennedy, a graduate of the Ecole supérieure de préparation et de perfectionnement des professeurs de français à l'étranger (Sorbonne), has published translations of poetry by Apollinaire, Ronsard, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Pierre Reverdy, and Robert Desnos, and a version of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* in the Penn Complete Greek Drama series. He has taught poetry at Tufts University, Wellesley College, the University of Michigan, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the University of California at Irvine, and Leeds University. His own verse has received the Lamont Award of the Academy of American Poets, the Aiken-Taylor Award of the University of the South and the *Sewanee Review*, a *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, and the Poets' Prize, and has been recognized with Guggenheim and NEA fellowships and the 2009 Robert Frost medal of the Poetry Society of America. Kennedy's *In a Prominent Bar in Secaucus: New and Selected Poems, 1955–2007* (Johns Hopkins University Press) was chosen as a Notable Book by the American Library Association in 2008.